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TROUBLE BY MAIL

A Comedy in One Act

BY

JOHN M. FRANCIS

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TROUBLES BY MAIL.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

JAMES BANKER, aged about thirty years, well dressed.

JAMES GUEST, his friend, same description.

MARTHA BANKER, Banker's wife, pretty, about twenty-eight years old, well dressed.

SHIRLEY SHIRLEY of Shirley, Mass., Mrs. Banker's friend, about the same age, well dressed in pretty traveling dress.

SERVANT, either maid servant or butler.

THE PLOT.

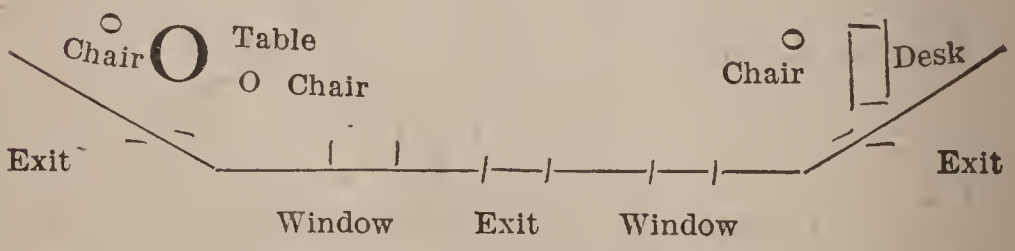
James Banker's jealousy is aroused by a telephone call for Mrs. Banker from some unknown person. He thinks it is from his chum, James Guest, who is an old college flame of his wife. His suspicions are further confirmed by his wife telling him of a bet she has made with Guest about his inability to recognize Guest's voice over the telephone. Complications then follow the finding of a letter, signed "Jim," that Guest drops out of an overcoat pocket. Mrs. Banker also becomes jealous by finding another letter from her best friend, Shirley Shirley. The letter is intended really for Guest, who has

dropped it out of his coat pocket. In the midst of this jealousy, Shirley arrives. She becomes involved in the melee. Everything is straightened out by the arrival of a telegram, stating that Guest's maiden aunt who has refused to permit Guest to marry, had died leaving Guest a million dollars.

THE PROPERTIES.

Desk, telephone on desk, writing materials in desk, table, two chairs, attorney's letter for Mrs. Banker, overcoat for Guest in the pocket of which is letter from Shirley, overcoat for Banker, boa and gloves for Mrs. Banker, list of names for Guest, letter in unaddressed envelope for Guest, letter from Shirley on desk, telegram for Jim, traveling bag for Shirley.

THE STAGE.



There are three entrances—left, right and center. The room can be furnished more elaborately than here shown, only the necessary furniture is given.

The play is laid in the house of James Banker. The time is afternoon of a cool fall day.

TROUBLES BY MAIL.

On the rise of the curtain, Banker is discovered at desk, writing. After a short time the telephone rings.

B. (*impatiently*) Well. Yes; this is Banker's residence. No. She's out. What? Hello. Hello. Hump. He's hung up. (*continues writing. Stops suddenly and thinks, tapping teeth with pen handle*) That man's called her up three times yesterday and twice to-day, and when he found he could not reach her he said never mind and rang off before I could get his name. Voice sounded familiar, too, very familiar. (*resumes writing. Stops and thinks*) Martha can't be having a flirtation. No; it's impossible. We've only been married for six months, and she's so devoted. No; it's not possible. Such a thought is unworthy of her. She's the dearest girl in all the world. (*resumes writing*)

(*Enter* MRS. BANKER, *center. She has just been to a tea. Goes to chair right of table, taking off gloves and boa.*)

MRS. B. I had a glorious time. Sally was there and she told me that Edith was engaged to—who do you think?

B. (*absentmindedly*) Y-e-s. (*writes*)

MRS. B. To Jack Withington.

B. Is that so?

MRS. B. To Jack Withington. Just think of it. She never looked at him at all last winter. Sally said it was a regular summer flirtation. It began, Sally said, because Edith was jealous of Clarence Hopely.

B. (*endeavoring to write*) Foolish for people to be jealous, isn't it?

MRS. B. Very. Any telephone calls for me?

B. A man's been trying to get you. Wouldn't leave any name.

MRS. B. Who was he?

B. His voice was familiar, sounded like—like—

MRS. B. It couldn't have been Jim, could it?

B. By George, that's who it was—Jim. I thought I recognized the voice. (*suspiciously*) What could he want? He's staying here.

MRS. B. (*laughing*) That's a joke on you. Yesterday morning at breakfast when you went out for a paper, we discussed your inability to recognize voices over the 'phone.

B. Mine?

MRS. B. Jim said you wouldn't be able to tell his, and I said that such a statement was ridiculous.

B. I should say so.

MRS. B. So Jim bet me that he would be able to call me up and you would not be able to know who he was.

B. It was a bet.

MRS. B. Five pounds of candy, and I guess I've lost. Jim's such a funny fellow, isn't he?

B. (*stagey laugh*) Yes, so funny. Trying to make me jealous, is he?

MRS. B. (*surprised*) Why, Jim.

B. (*with determination*) But he can't; I'm not jealous.

MRS. B. Why should you be? Have I ever——

B. Of course not—never. (*affectionately*) Why, little girl, I should like to see anything that could make me jealous of you.

(*Enter servant with mail, center. After handing it to* BANKER, *she exits center.*)

B. (*sorting mail*) The idea is too absurd because—(*picking out a letter*) Here's one for you. (*hands it to his wife*)

MRS. B. I wonder who it's from. (*opens it*)

B. (*aside as she reads*) I wonder who it's from; looks like Jim's handwriting. If it is, this joke's being carried too far. (MRS. BANKER *has finished reading. She nervously attempts to hide letter*) Who is it from, dearie?

MRS. B. O, it's from someone.

B. (*suspiciously*) It is; that's funny. (*forced laugh*) I suppose Jim's telling you what a fine joke he's had on me.

MRS. B. Perhaps. (*aside*) I can't show him this.

B. (*angry*) Who is it from?

MRS. B. Why, Jim. You're actually—yes, I believe you're jealous.

B. Absurd. Didn't I just tell you——

MRS. B. (*going towards him affectionately*) Of course you aren't, my dear. I—I—was just joking. That story about Jim's telephone bet——

B. (*snappishly*) Well.

MRS. B. It was just made up to see if I could make you jealous.

B. (*surprised*) But you found you couldn't, didn't you? I couldn't be jealous; it isn't in my make-up. But tell me, who's the letter from?

MRS. B. (*very affectionately*) Teasing again.

Well, I am going to prove to you you can't be made jealous by not telling you who the letter is from. (*affectionately slapping* BANKER'S *hand*) There, that's to punish me for suspecting me about the telephone.

B. (*pleased*) Martha, you're lovely.

MRS. B. And if you are very good from now until dinner. I'll—I'll show you the letter——

B. Martha.

MRS. B. Perhaps; but you must be a good boy. (*exits, left*)

B. (*looking after her*) By George, that girl's irresistible. (*with determination*) Jealous of her? Well, I guess not; she's as true as steel. (*goes back to desk*) And now for those messages. (*resumes writing*)

(*Enter* JAMES GUEST, *center. He wears an overcoat. He throws overcoat on back of chair, right of table. Note drops out of overcoat pocket on to chair.*)

J. I certainly am enjoying my visit. That tea was great.

B. Martha enjoyed it.

J. I'm a regular social success.

B. Good thing for you you have a wealthy aunt to finance you. You don't know how to work.

J. She won't let me. She says it's not gentlemanly. She won't let me marry, either.

B. Why?

J. (*laughing*) She says it's not gentlemanly.

B. Not gentlemanly?

J. She's convinced that sooner or later all married persons are divorced and she says it is vulgar for anybody to appear in court and get their names in the papers. So I am dependent upon her

whims. She says she is going to leave me all her money, so until she dies, I must bob about; but when she passes on, I'm going to break loose. (*going to desk*) How are the notes coming on?

B. (*shows note*) Here's the one for Billy.

J. Great. Old Billy will never suspect the joke. How embarrassed he'll be to get this from Mabel the evening before his marriage.

B. (*becoming more pleasant*) It'll recall old times.

J. (*examining handwriting*) I don't see how you can copy handwriting so cleverly.

B. I've had a lot of fun with it. Do you remember the excuses I used to write for you at college.

J. Even Mother couldn't tell they were forgeries. (*takes list out of pocket. In doing so, letter in unaddressed envelope drops out and falls on floor beside desk*) But let's check up and see that you have them all.

B. (*laying letter aside*) There's Billy's, from Mabel; and Sam's, from— (*they inspect list*) Yes, they're all right. I'll take them and telephone Nials at the club so that there will be no mistake in delivering them. (*takes up telephone*) It's a busy person, this being best man at a wedding. (*to telephone operator*) Give me— What's the number, Jim?

B. (*crossing stage to left*) Metropolitan 122445.

J. (*to telephone*) Metropolitan 12— What's the rest?

B. 2445.

J. 2445— What?—I can't remember the exchange— The Mercury Club.

B. Metropolitan 122445.

J. Metropolitan 122445. (*telephones*)

B. (*aside*) That voice was his. Martha's deceiving me. It was Jim. I'll ask him.

J. And be sure about it. (*hangs up receiver*) There. That's done. Everything's O. K.

B. (*seriously*) Everything isn't O. K., Jim.

J. What's the matter?

B. I'm going to talk seriously with you, and I want you to play fair with me.

J. Jim Banker, of course I'll play fair with you. Something's happened. I thought you were grouchy when I came in here. What's the trouble, old man?

B. Have you telephoned my wife?

J. Telephoned your wife? Of course, I have. Why, in those early days, I used to spend several hours daily telling Martha what a nice girl she was, hoping for a dinner invitation——

B. I don't mean then. I mean to-day or yesterday.

J. (*mystified*) No, I don't think——

B. It isn't time to think. Did you—yes or no?

J. No. Can't I——

B. No; you can't.

J. Jim Banker, I never thought it of you. Jealous—and jealous of your old chum at that. (*shakes head*)

B. Jealous. Absurd. I'm not jealous. Nothing could make me jealous of Martha, or Martha of me.

J. Nothing? Bosh. I've made you jealous without trying. What could I do if I wanted to try? I could make both of you jealous.

B. I won't listen to you. It's too absurd.

J. You're so sure of yourself, I've a mind to prove it, but no, I like you both too well.

B. (*with determination*) Go ahead with your proof.

J. Nope.

B. (*savagely*) I dare you.

J. Nonsense, Jim, you don't know what you're saying.

B. I wouldn't let anybody call a bluff I made.

J. (*with determination*) All right. I'll prove it. You just write the letter I dictate. (BANKER *hesitates*)

J. My test's no good unless you do as I say.

B. All right. (*goes to desk*)

J. (*walking up and down stage as he dictates*) Let's see. "Dearest Martha: This will prove to you what an injustice you have done me. Your devoted husband, Jim. There. (*sits down at chair, left of table, very much pleased with himself*)

B. There?

J. Send it to her.

B. (*writing*) Mrs. James Banker. (JIM *goes to desk and looks over* BANKER'S *shoulder*)

J. Not in your own handwriting. Imitate some woman's.

B. (*picks up* SHIRLEY'S *note on the desk*) That looks pretty good.

J. Now, down in the corner of the envelope put some girl's name—Edwina or Edwythe or something light and fluffy like that and mark it personal.

B. I have the very name. (*writing and smiling*) Shirley. (JIM *starts*) After the trotter I hope to buy for her this afternoon as a surprise for her birthday to-morrow. There. (*blotting envelope*) I'm expecting to hear from that deal at any time (BANKER *fixes letter.* JIM *has not been paying any attention*)

J. (*aside, thoughtfully*) Shirley, if he only knew.

B. You send this to her from the club. (*they exit, center*)

(*Enter* MRS. BANKER, *left.*)

MRS. B. (*laughing*). Jim's jealous. I really

couldn't help making him so for I couldn't show him this letter. I felt it was that hateful, old bill I've been owing so long for the inkstand I gave Jim last Christmas. It was the bill, enclosed in this horrid note. What did he say: "Dear Madam: Smith & Co. have authorized the collection of this bill. To avoid litigation, please remit at once and oblige. Yours truly. B. Mulligan, attorney." Isn't that dreadful? What will I do? I'm glad Shirley's coming. She is such a help in a scrape. (*walking to desk*) Her letter's so queer. "I will arrive to-morrow afternoon—that's to-day—I hope you can store me somewhere. I have a reason for coming to New York that I cannot explain just now. You'll understand later. You're old school chum, Shirley." (*telephone rings*) Hello. No. I'm not Mr. Banker. I'm Mrs. Banker. Will I do? Tell him— What? Tell him that Shirley wants him? Hello. Hello. (*jigs telephone up and down*) Shirley wants him. What does Shirley want of him?

(*Enter servant, center. Hands* MRS. BANKER *a letter.*)

SER. A boy just delivered it.

MRS. B. A letter for him from (*reads corner*) from—from Shirley. (*to servant*) That'll do. (*servant bows and exits, center*) The—the—impudence. To write me that she is coming here for a reason that she cannot explain, to telephone that she wants him and—and—to write him here. (*she sits in chair, right of table and weeps. Suddenly feels note on chair. Picks it up and reads it*) A note in her handwriting. (*reads*) Dearest Jim. (*turns over page*) I'll see you shortly and unexpectedly. Your own loving Shirley." (*cries*)

Married only six months and this. (*angrily*) James Banker, you will suffer for this insult. I will place this note on his desk in his den with my own hands so he'll know that I know all. (*exits, right*)

(*Enter, center,* BANKER.)

B. (*looking around*) Thought I'd come back to see the fun. Wonder if the letter's arrived yet. Probably on the desk. (*goes to desk and discovers letter on the floor*) Ah. Here it is. (*picks it up*) No, this envelope isn't addressed. (*opens and reads*) "My dearest darling:" (*inspects envelope and letter again*) Jim's handwriting. (*reads*) "I cannot tell you how much I love you. It is more satisfactory to write, and besides it is safer, too, for there are no eavesdroppers. Conversations overheard are frequently misunderstood. (*turns over page*) Your own Jim." (*crumples letter in hand*) So, Jim Guest, I was right. Renewing your old college flirtation with Martha, are you?—right under my own roof, too. I'll put this in Martha's boudoir on her sewing table with my own hands so she'll know that I know all about her treachery. (*exits, left*)

(*Enter* JIM, *center. He looks about.*)

J. I must have dropped them. They aren't here. (*feeling in pockets*) I wouldn't have Jim or Martha find them for the world. Both of them are gossips and if they found those letters, the cat would be out of the bag and the news would reach Auntie who would immediately cut me off without a cent and I need the money too badly. (*looks about*)

(*Enter* MRS. BANKER, *right.*)

MRS. B. (*too frustrated to notice* JIM'S *hunting.*

She speaks aside) My husband's chum. I'll confide in him. (*to* JIM) Jim, I'm in trouble.

J. (*aside*) So am I.

MRS. B. As my husband's best friend, I appeal to you.

J. (*taken back*) Why, th-thank you.

MRS. B. (*showing letter*) Do you see that?

J. (*reaching for letter and aside*) Shirley's letter.

MRS. B. (*retaining letter*) No. That's my husband's property.

J. (*suspiciously*) Your husband's?

MRS. B. Yes. She wrote him. She, my best friend. She tricked me. She's written him.

J. Let me have it.

MRS. B. No. I had intended placing it on his desk, but I've changed my mind. I'll give it to him myself.

J. I must have that letter.

MRS. B. You shall not shield him. I will give it to him. I will charge him with his treachery to his face.

J. Just let me read the letter.

MRS. B. (*hands him letter*) There, read it.

J. It certainly is expressive.

(*Re-enter* BANKER, *left.* MRS. BANKER *and* JIM *are looking over letter with their backs towards* BANKER.)

MRS. B. My dearest.

B. (*aside in stage whisper*) Her dearest.

MRS. B. (*still reading*) I have longed for you.

B. (*aside*) She has longed for him.

J. (*putting letter in his pocket*) There's no need now for this letter.

MRS. B. We'll talk it over in the den where we

will not be disturbed. (*exit* MRS. BANKER *and* JIM, *right*)

B. (*goes to door and listens*) Do my ears deceive me? I would have trusted Martha with my life, and Jim, too. They have wrecked my home—my happiness—after just six months. It was a good thing I changed my mind about this letter. (*waves letter*) I will go in there and charge them with their treachery— (*exits, right*)

(*Enter Servant and* SHIRLEY, *center.*)

SER. I'll tell Mrs. Banker. (*exits, left*)

SHIR. Dear, old Martha. How surprised she'll be when I tell her I came here to meet the man who is visiting her. I simply could not stand it any longer. I love Jim. Ah, those happy times we spent studying in the library together in Paris, he never guessed my name. I've only been Shirley to him. I was afraid that he might find out that I was the only daughter of Charles Shirley, and make love to me for my money. (*laughs*) I made him believe I was a poor student, just as he was; and yet he loves me. His letters show that. They have all been addressed to Shirley, Box 76, New York. I had Arthur forward them to me.

(*Re-enter* BANKER, *right. Goes to desk.*)

B. (*talking to himself*) I'm going to look for more evidence in this desk before I charge them with their treachery. (*fumbles through desk*)

SHIR. How do you do?

B. (*preoccupied*) Yes, of course.

S. Don't you remember me—the girl with the queer name—Shirley Shirley of Shirley, Mass.

B. (*forced cordiality, shakes* SHIRLEY'S *hand so*

hard she winces) How do you do? Nice day, isn't it?

S. Mr. Banker.

B. (*recovering himself*) I beg your pardon. I was busy. I didn't expect you.

S. I really invited myself. How's Martha?

B. She's pretty well. She's—ah—busy.

S. Everybody's busy?

B. The way of the world. Have a drink. I mean, a smoke.

S. (*aside*) He's queer.

B. I mean your hat—take it off.

S. Thank you. (*takes hat off*)

(*Enter* MRS. BANKER, *right.*)

B. You have such pretty hair.

S. (*laughing*) You have a sweet tongue.

MRS. B. (*aside*) Insolence. (*exits, right*)

B. (*at left exit*) This way.

S. Thank you. (*exits, left*)

B. You can have the red room. (*exits, left*)

(*Enter* JIM, *right.*)

J. (*whisper*) Where.

MRS. J. They're gone.

J. I cannot believe it of Jim.

MRS. B. I couldn't either, even when she telephoned she wanted him, but that letter——

J. Yes, of course——

MRS. J. And those loving speeches that I overheard just now in this very room.

J. He said?

MRS. B. Enough to prove our marriage a mockery.

J. He loved you.

MRS. J. Love? He knows nothing of it. Come with me and hear how the faithless wretch regards his love for me. (*exits, left*)

J. Not for a thousand dollars would I listen to her. (JIM *is back stage, right*)

(*Enter* SHIRLEY, *center, fixing hair. She does not see* JIM.)

J. (*aside*) Shirley. My Shirley. (*to* SHIRLEY) Ahem.

S. (*starts*) Jim. (*then coldly turns back and goes to chair, right of table, in which she sits*) Oh, how do you do, Mr. Guest.

J. Mr. Guest, Shirley?

S. (*still fixing hair*) Miss Shirley please, if you must address me at all.

J. I don't understand.

S. (*angrily*) What?

J. After all the letters that we've written——

S. May I ask if you showed all of yours to Mr. Banker before sending them to me?

J. Showed them to Jim? I don't understand.

S. Don't you? Your letter——

J. Let me explain.

S. Written to his wife, he tells me.

J. But, Shirley, listen——

S. You betrayed your friend's hospitality, and while amusing yourself with me you——

J. You don't understand.

S. Flirt with another woman, the wife of your best friend, an old flame.

J. Please listen.

S. Oh, Mr. Banker has told me all—the telephone bet, the note——

J. But——

S. Listen— No. Hear me out. I had come to

New York to meet you. You had written you were visiting here, little knowing that Mrs. Banker was my best friend. I came here (*begins to cry*) to tell you that I loved you and was ready to marry you—

J. Oh, Shirley.

S. To throw myself at your head; but what do I find? A flirtation with your host's wife. I'm glad I found you out before it was too late. I'm going home. (*exits center*)

J. (*following*) Shirley. Shirley. (*comes front*) I bet Jim a letter would cause jealousy. I win—and lose the dearest girl in all the world. (*with sudden determination*) I'm going home. (*exits, right*)

(*Enter, left,* Mr. *and* Mrs. Banker. Mrs. Banker *carries a handbag. She is viciously pinning a big hat on her head. The hat is on the side.*)

Mrs. B. I'm going home. (*puts bag on the floor while she arranges hat*)

B. Martha, I explained——

Mrs. B. You're explanation did not explain. Your infidelity is infamous.

B. (*sulkily*) No worse than yours. That letter from Jim.

Mrs. B. But I explained——

B. The letter required no explanation. It spoke for itself. (*telephone bell rings*)

Mrs. B. It was a mistake. (*telephone bell rings*)

B. That I found it, I suppose.

Mrs. B. It was not for me. (*telephone bell rings*)

B. Answer that 'phone.

Mrs. B. Not even please, now. (*telephone bell rings*)

B. Oh, well. Please then. (*sarcastically*) You may find out that Shirley wants me. (*telephone bell rings*)

MRS. B. She can't telephone. She's here. (*telephone bell rings very loudly*)

B. Nevertheless you'll probably find out that Shirley wants me. You're afraid to answer it.

MRS. B. Afraid. Nonsense. (*picks up telephone*) Hello. What? Yes, he's here. (*to* BANKER) Shirley does want you. (*offers telephone to* BANKER) Here.

B. No. In fairness to me, find out for yourself how injust you've been.

MRS. B. (*talking in telephone*) Yes. Just a moment. He's coming. (*to* BANKER) Please. (BANKER *shakes head*) Well, this is Mrs. Banker. I'll take the message. Tell him that you've bought Shirley. I don't understand. Tell him that you've bought the trotter Shirley. Thank you. Good-bye. (*to* BANKER) Jim, what does this mean?

J. Simply that I've bought the famous trotting mare Shirley for a birthday present for you. The girl you heard was the long distance operator, telling me that Shirley, Mass., wanted to speak with me.

MRS. B. I did—didn't understand.

B. Furthermore, will you kindly open that letter marked Shirley on the envelope and read it.

MRS. B. It isn't necessary.

B. Pardon me, it is necessary—in justice to me. (MRS. BANKER *opens the letter and reads*)

B. Well?

MRS. B. Jim, I'm wrong.

B. And you're wrong about that other letter from Shirley. Believe it or not as you will. I know nothing of it. It was not meant for me.

MRS. B. I do believe you.

B. (*producing letter*) But this letter—who is it from?

(*Enter* JIM, *right.*)

J. I wrote that.

B. (*satisfied*) There. There doesn't seem to be much more to be said. (*to* JIM) Except that I want to know why you wrote that letter.

J. (*nervously*) I cannot explain——

MRS. B. You must explain, Jim.

J. I can't.

(*Enter Servant, center, with telegram for* JIM.)

B. You're convicting yourself by this silence.

JIM. (*reading*) Hurray, Auntie's dead. (*dances a jig*)

B. and MRS. B. What?

J. And she's left me a million.

MRS. B. I don't understand——

J. (*reading telegram*) Provided I marry within six days after her funeral. Hurrah. (*rushes about shaking hands with* MR. *and* MRS. BANKER)

B. Stop. Tell us——

J. Not till after I've seen Shirley. (*exits, center*)

B. There's some misunderstanding.

MRS. B. Jim, I never saw that letter before you showed it to me. Won't you believe me, Jim?

B. Martha, I do believe you. (*goes to embrace her*)

MRS. B. No, not yet. That letter you asked me about this afternoon. Not until you have read it. Here. (*hands it to* BANKER)

B. (*offers it back*) I don't need to read it. I trust you.

MRS. B. In justice to me, read it.

B. (*reads*) And so that is why you wouldn't

show it to me. Martha, you're a darling. (*goes to desk and writes check*)

(*Enter* SHIRLEY *and* JIM. *Both very happy and both very much mussed.*)

S. We've come to tell you that we want your blessing.

MRS. B. (*gushingly*) Shirley.

B. (*slapping* JIM *on the back*) Jim.

MRS. B. (*taking* SHIRLEY, *right*) Tell us how it all happened.

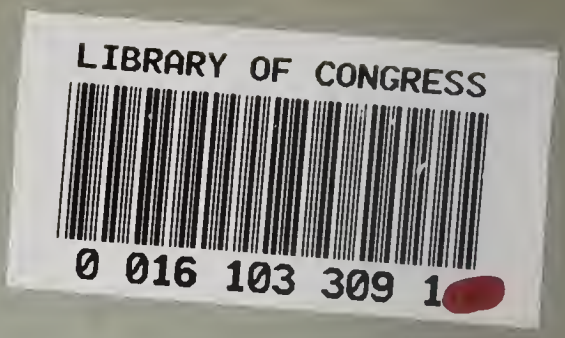
S. You see, Jim dropped some notes.

B. You dropped some notes.

J. They caused troubles.

S. Troubles By Mail.

CURTAIN.

JUL 25 1913

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